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SEBI PENALISES HDFC BANK FOR VIOLATING ITS ORDER

Sebi has directed HDFC Bank to deposit ₹158.68 crore along with interest in an escrow account and pay ₹1 crore penalty

LENDER INVOKED PLEDGED SHARES

The action comes after a probe by the Securities and Exchange Board of India found the lender unilaterally invoked securities pledged by stock broking firm BRH Wealth Kreators to the extent of ₹158.68 crore. This violated an interim order by Sebi restraining BRH from accessing the securities market and buying or selling in securities, directly or indirectly

TO SORT OUT OUTAGE ISSUE IN 3 MONTHS

- Meanwhile, HDFC Bank has submitted a detailed plan of action to RBI to address repeated service disruption issues due to outage
- The action plan will take 10-12 weeks for implementation. Last month, RBI had temporarily barred the bank from launching new digital banking initiatives and issuing new credit cards | P13

2%

BANK'S SHARES FELL ₹30.25 APIECE TO ₹1,443.65 ON THE B.S.E. ON FRIDAY

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARWAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Sparks fly at CWC meet, party shifts polls to June

RICHA SHARMA @ New Delhi

THE Congress Working Committee (CWC) on Friday decided not to hold presidential elections in a hurry, despite the growing dissent among a section of senior leaders over the delay in addressing leadership issues and organisational polls. Election to the post of party president will now be held in June, said AICC general secretary K C Venugopal.

According to sources, the decision to delay party polls was taken keeping in mind the upcoming assembly elections. The meeting witnessed heated moments with some leaders questioning the party's reluctance to hold organisational polls. Several leaders, including those who wrote to interim party chief Sonia Gandhi about leadership vacuum, demanded organisational elections be held immediately but they were told that presidential elections will happen first.

This group senior leaders like includes Ghulam Nabi Azad, P Chidamabaram, Anand Sharma and Mukul Wasnik. However, another group comprising Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, Punjab Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh, and former defence minister A K Antony were of the view that presidential elections should happen after the assembly polls in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam and Puducherry are over.

Sources said there were heated exchanges between Azad, Anand Sharma and Gehlot over the demand for organisational elections. Gehlot reportedly said the BJP doesn't talk about internal elections like in the Congress and that the first priority is to fight the state polls. He also said all of them are here because of the party, to which Anand Sharma responded he has also worked for 40 years for the party.

In May, Sonia will complete two years as interim chief of the party after Rahul Gandhi stepped down following the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. P9

Both sides meet for just 20-25 mins; no fresh date for talks; govt seeks final response today

Govt's best offer rejected, talks hit a dead end

Ministers Narendra Singh Tomar (R) and Piyush Goyal during talks with farmer unions, in New Delhi on Friday | PTI

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi/Chandigarh

AFTER protesting farmers rejected the government offer to keep the three farm laws in abeyance, differences between the two sides widened with the Centre saying it had nothing more to offer and blaming the farmers for the failed talks on Friday.

No date was set for the next meeting, indicating there was no common ground. Sources said Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar expressed unhappiness at the farmers sharing with the media their decision to reject the government's offer on Thursday.

Tomar said the farmers did not have their own welfare in mind even as they were threatening to intensify their stir. "The talks remained inconclusive as farmers' welfare was not at the heart of the talks from the unions' side. It's sad," he said. Tomar urged the farmers to reconsider the proposal as it was in the interest of farmers and the country, and threw the ball in their court. "The unions said they only want the repeal of the laws despite the Centre seeking alternative suggestions. We asked them to reconsider our proposal and convey their decision tomorrow," he said.

"The government has made it clear that the three laws will not be repealed and that it had made its best offer. They told us to reconsider their proposal," Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Balbir Singh Rajewal said.

The farmers said although they were at the venue for five hours, the two sides were face-to-face for less than an hour. "The meeting actually happened for only 20-25 minutes. The Centre kept saying we should accept their proposal," said Shiv Kumar Kakkaji Sharma of the Rashtriya Kisan Mahasangh. With the talks deadlocked, farmers are now preparing for the tractor rally on Republic Day. P9

Threat to leaders

At least three farmers leaders were allegedly threatened over the phone or through social media while one of them accused the police of damaging his car's windscreen | P9

Police question Hampana over 'remarks' against PM

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Mysuru

WELL-KNOWN scholar, Kannada poet and writer **Hampa Nagarajaiah** was on Thursday summoned by the Mandya East police for questioning in connection with a complaint against him for allegedly criticising PM Narendra Modi. However, the move to call the 85-year-old poet for inquiry has not gone down well with litterateurs and progressive thinkers who have condemned it and termed it as "restriction on freedom of speech".

Nagarajaiah, who had taken part in the Mandya Taluk Sahitya Sammelana on January 17, had allegedly criticised the PM during his speech and compared the Centre to 'Duryodhana', the character from the epic 'Mahabharata'. Following this, one M C Ravi filed a complaint at the Mandya East police station on January 19, alleging that he had made a provocative speech. Following the petition, Mandya East police station PSI questioned him in this regard. However, no FIR has been filed so far.

Writers including Prof G Siddaramaiah, Baraguru Ramachandrappa and other progressive thinkers and judges expressed displeasure against summoning Nagarajaiah. P7

EXPRESS READ

Kamala as Veep to up US-India ties: WH

Washington: The historic inauguration of Kamala Harris as the US Vice President has further cemented the importance of the relationship between the US and India, according to a top White House official. White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said President Biden respects the long successful relationship between the two countries.

Another minister quits Mamata cabinet

Kolkata: In yet another jolt for the TMC dispensation, West Bengal forest minister Rajib Banerjee quit the Mamata Banerjee cabinet, joining the growing list of dissenters who have put the ruling camp in a tight spot ahead of the assembly elections. The TMC, however, asserted that Banerjee's move would have no impact on the party. P10

Shivamogga Superblast: Probe to reverse-read trail

RAMACHANDRA V GUNARI & MARX TEJASWI @ Shivamogga

A day after gelatin sticks loaded on a truck exploded, killing five labourers at a stone crushing unit at Hunasodu village near the city late on Thursday night, the State Government has ordered a high-level inquiry into the incident. The intensity of the blast was such that the sound could be heard till an aerial distance of 70-80 km.

Due to the explosion, the lorry on which the gelatin sticks were stocked, was completely blown to bits while the bodies of the five labourers were strewn across the site. Many pieces of the lorry were found on the roof of a house situated about one km away from the spot. The dust raised due to the explosion had engulfed trees all around and the rooftops of the temporary sheds constructed at the site.

Shivamogga Deputy Commissioner K B Sivakumar told The New Indian Express that the explosion occurred because of a jelly-kind of explosive stored in a stationary lorry at the stone crushing unit. "We do not know yet whether the crushing unit was operating legally or illegally. It will be investigated. But one thing is clear that there was illegal storing of explosives at the unit," he said. P5

Bomb squad personnel scan the blast site on the outskirts of Shivamogga city on Friday | SHIMOGA NANDAN

₹5 lakh relief for victims' kin

SHIVAMOGGA: Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa has announced ₹5 lakh compensation each to the immediate kin of the labourers who were killed in the explosion. The CM said a bomb disposal squad and a mine detecting team have been sent to the blast site. "We will take suitable action once the preliminary report is out. I have instructed the Shivamogga Deputy Commissioner to release compensation to the kin of the five deceased. I'll also be visiting the spot on Saturday," he said.

Day after cabinet reshuffle, CM makes some course correction

ANUSHA RAVI @ Bengaluru

LESS than 24 hours after he allocated portfolios to the seven new ministers and reshuffled ministries among his other cabinet colleagues, Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa resorted to another round of rejig on Friday.

Owing to dissent among ministers over portfolios allocated to them, Yediyurappa went into damage-control mode to woo his cabinet colleagues, especially after a few newcomers — who were given cabinet berths for quitting the Congress and JDS in 2019 and helping the BJP form the government in Karnataka — are believed to have threatened to quit as MLAs.

On Friday, Yediyurappa reshuffled the portfolios of six ministers — J C Madhuswamy, Aravind Limbavali, Gopalaiah, N Nagaraj (MTB), R Shankar and K C Narayana Gowda. Madhuswamy, who earlier held the Minor Irrigation and Law & Parliamentary Affairs portfolio, was divested of both on Thursday and given charge of Medical Education, much to his dislike. Madhuswamy has now been given Haj & Wakf Development in addition to Medical Education. Sources close to the minister suggested that his grouse over losing the Minor Irrigation portfolio to C P Yogeshwar continues and he is unlikely to take charge of the new portfolios at least until January 26, after which he will hold discussions with the CM.

Aravind Limbavali, who was given the Forest portfolio on Thursday, has now been given additional charge of Kannada and Culture department. K C Narayana Gowda, who was given Youth Affairs and Sports, got additional charge of Planning, Programme Monitoring and Statistics. P4

With discontent after portfolio allocation, CM B S Yediyurappa on Friday made another rejig | EXPRESS

COMPLICATED SCENE

While Friday's reshuffle was CM B S Yediyurappa's attempt to pacify miffed ministers, the situation continues to be complicated especially among senior cabinet members, whose portfolios have been changed.

Sarkari bungalows full, new mantris scout for houses

ASHWINI M SRIPAD @ Bengaluru

NOW that the seven new ministers have been inducted and even allocated portfolios, they are on a house-hunting spree in Bengaluru as all the government bungalows are full. According to information from the Department of Personnel Administrative Reforms, there are 23 government bungalows in Bengaluru that are allotted to ministers, judges and government executives. These are located on Race Course Road, Kumara Krupa Road, Jayamahal Extension and other places in the state capital.

While the CM has been allotted 'Krishna' and 'Cauvery', other official bunglows, including at 7 ministers' quarters in Vasanthnagar, are occupied. With just 23 bungalows, the State Government was able to provide them to the first set of 17 ministers who took oath in August 2019 and a few of those who took oath as ministers in February 2020. While ministers Dr K Sudhakar and B C Patil were lucky to get allotments, K Gopalaiah could not. "I had started looking for rented house near Vidhana Soudha and then Covid struck. Now, I am using my MLA office as minister's office," he said. P4

NCB busts international drug ring run by Taliban, ISI

BALA CHAUHAN @ Bengaluru

IN a major exposé, the Narcotics Control Bureau has unearthed an international narcotic drugs syndicate which is allegedly run jointly by the Taliban, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and also has roots in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Australia and the Maldives.

"Because of heavy troop deployment along the international borders, narcotic drugs are being smuggled by sea. Heroin from Afghanistan is smuggled into Pakistan by the Taliban and ISI and then shipped out from the Karachi port in fishing vessels to Sri Lanka, Maldives and Australia. The other route takes the contraband drugs to Mozambique. Iranian boats are often exploited by this network. The precursor chemicals used for the production of heroin, especially acetic anhydrite, is transited to Afghanistan from Iran," said Deputy Director, Operations, NCB, K P S Malhotra.

"A lot of mid-sea transfer takes place in territorial waters of India or very near to its territorial waters. The cross-continent illicit drug trade has some Pakistani, Sri Lankan and Indian nationals, who are arrested and jailed on drug trafficking charges in Sri Lanka and lodged in prisons there. They are involved in the coordination of the drugs movement, primarily heroin, from Afghanistan," he said. P5

Drugs, pistols and cell phones seized by the NCB in November | EXPRESS

Because of heavy troop deployment along the international borders, narcotic drugs are being smuggled by sea

KPS Malhotra, Deputy Director, Operations, NCB

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